
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6226 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING CROSS-REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND ANIMAL CRUELTY.

SUMMARY:

This bill requires state, regional, and municipal animal control officers (ACOs) and Department of Children and Families (DCF) employees to report to the Department of Agriculture (DOAG) commissioner when they reasonably suspect that an animal is being treated cruelly, harmed, or neglected. The agriculture commissioner must forward the information he receives from the ACOs to the DCF commissioner in a monthly report. The DCF commissioner must then determine whether any address in an animal cruelty report corresponds to an address where there is an open investigation of a child.

The DCF commissioner must develop and implement training for her department's employees on (1) how to identify cruelty or harm to or neglect of animals and (2) their relationship to child welfare case practices. She must also train ACOs concerning identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. All training must be accomplished within available appropriations.

*House Amendment "A" deletes provisions in the original file (File 406) requiring that a DCF report of animal cruelty to DOAG be made anonymously and creating an exemption from reporting if it would interfere with DCF's child welfare duties.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2011

REPORT TO THE AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER

Animal Control Officers

Under the bill, when a state, regional, or municipal ACO, in the

course of his or her work, reasonably suspects that an animal has been harmed, neglected, or treated cruelly in violation of the law and files the requisite petition in Superior Court, the ACO must also report in writing to the DOAG commissioner. The ACO must file the report as soon as practicable but no later than 48 hours after filing the court petition. The bill identifies the following contents, if known, the report must include:

1. the address where the animal was seen and the name and address of its owner or caretaker;
2. the animal's name and description;
3. the nature and extent of the harm, neglect, or cruelty and the approximate date and time it occurred;
4. any information regarding any prior harm, neglect, or cruelty to the animal;
5. how the ACO learned of the harm, neglect, or cruelty; and
6. the name and address of everyone the ACO reasonably suspects to be responsible.

DCF Employees

The bill requires DCF employees who, in the course of their work, reasonably suspect that an animal has been harmed, neglected or treated cruelly in violation of the law, to report orally to the DOAG commissioner.

Like the ACO's report, the DCF employee must make it as soon as practicable but no more than 48 hours after observing the suspected harm, neglect, or animal cruelty. The DCF report must include the information in 1 to 3 listed above.

DOAG COMMISSIONER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Monthly, beginning November 1, 2011, the DOAG commissioner must report all the information he or she receives from the ACOs for the preceding month to the DCF commissioner. The bill does not

require the DOAG commissioner to forward any information he receives from a DCF employee; but presumably, the DOAG could take action on the animal abuse reports received from DCF.

DCF COMMISSIONER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Within a week of receiving the DOAG report, the DCF commissioner must determine whether an address linked to an animal abuse report is the same as a location where DCF has opened a child welfare investigation. If so, the commissioner must give the department's investigator the relevant information from the DOAG report on the matter and include it in the DCF record on the child.

By October 1, 2012, the commissioner must develop and implement, in consultation with the DOAG commissioner, training for DCF employees on identifying harm, neglect, and cruelty to animals and its relationship to child welfare case practice. The training must be provided annually.

The DCF commissioner must also make training available to all ACOs on the accurate and prompt identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Select Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference
Yea 9 Nay 0 (02/22/2011)

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 20 Nay 5 (03/21/2011)

Planning and Development Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 19 Nay 0 (04/18/2011)

Human Services Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 17 Nay 0 (05/10/2011)